

July 5, 2006
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
U.S. House of Representatives

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND
NONPROLIFERATION**

EDWARD R. ROYCE, CALIFORNIA, CHAIRMAN

SUBJECT: BORDER VULNERABILITIES AND INTERNATIONAL
TERRORISM—TESTIMONY OF SHERIFF RICK FLORES, WEBB
COUNTY, TEXAS

Honorable Mr. Royce, Honorable Committee Members, Distinguished
Visitors:

At the request of the Hon. Henry Hyde, chairman of the committee of
the whole, today's focus is on Border Vulnerabilities and International
Terrorism—issues which Chairman Hyde says are “separate but
related.”

**Mr. Hyde has requested that our focus, at least in part, be aimed
at the risk to our southern border on terrorist entry and other
border weak points.**

Risks to our southern border are almost an article of faith. Equally
acceptable is the belief that our borders are porous.

How so?

For a long time, smugglers of narcotics and human cargoes have
had, and continue to have, clandestine infrastructures in place to
force their loads through gaps in our security.

**And smugglers have one priority—MONEY! And they haven't a
care who they victimize or what hard consequences they set in
motion.**

As open as our borders are to narcotics and human smuggling, so well-placed are these channels of contraband, that in the blink of an eye, people who seek entry with treacherous motives, can easily pose as those who simply seek a better life.

Our southern border is ripe for a terrorist pipeline—even assuming that not one single terrorist has infiltrated thus far, even assuming that we lack confirmation of Middle Eastern groups assimilating into the Mexican culture.

In point of fact, anybody with terrorist motives, of any nationality, can find a place in the smugglers' pipeline. There's room for anything and anybody.

So long as smugglers get top dollar, they'll turn a blind eye to any threat their cargo—human or otherwise—might pose to the safety of Americans.

The weakness of our southern border hasn't escaped notice of the drug cartels. We've seen military, or semi-military incursions, threatening firepower to protect their loads, as shown by the graphic obtained from the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*.

All along our southern border, the cartels are adapting to particular terrains. For example, in Webb County with 87 miles of riverfront, the 6th largest county in Texas with 3,400 square miles, all of which is thicketed ranchland which provides cover and concealment, they've adopted well.

Its getting to the point that ranchers are always fixing barbed-wire fences cut by smugglers. One rancher was so annoyed that he installed a gate—and now, when he rides his fence line, he often finds a \$100-bill stuck to the gate—an obvious thank-you message from smugglers.

Cartels have databases on prominent families, and make good use of the information to make their threats credible, striking wherever they detect weakness, shaking them down to shut them up.

Covert pathways for smugglers are as varied as the terrains—that is why each of my brother sheriffs should be supported to adopt a plan best suited to their area.

For some time, the U.S. Congress has been provided notice of the urgent situation—assuming terrorists have yet to make use of our southern border. And if terrorists have already crossed undetected, then there’s a deeper sense of urgency.

Please understand that the joint plea of border sheriffs is based on common concerns as well as their own unique situations. All of us are first responders. If a call for help goes out, it goes to each of us and we have to have boots on the ground to take immediate action.

Coalition members have been protecting our borders from cross-over crime for a long time, for decades, in fact. Except that now, the drug and human smuggling cartels have raised the ante and the threat continues to grow.

In one area of riverfront about 12 miles south of Laredo, to put it in the words of Major Doyle Holdridge, a former Texas Ranger who now heads our Criminal/Patrol Division, “It gets western!”

So now we ask for resources to help contain the threat, that we may continue to respond with diligence with much needed help to protect our communities along the border, and to protect America.

We need boots on the ground, equipment and training and our attitude is such that we encourage Congress to allocate resources.

In this regard its important to note that any help Congress gives other agencies will be a help which we all applaud, because all

of us have a huge stake in border security which is linked to homeland security.

Keep in mind, they care nothing of sneaking high-risk infiltrators across our borders—so long as the money is right. They care nothing of potential threats to the safety and security of the United States—so long as the money is right.

They seem to have a free hand in their operations and they've been unstoppable for decades.

We need help.